"Charting the Landscape/Mapping New Paths": Project Descriptions

1.   **Project Name: Brarydog: Homework Help & Web Companion**

2.   **Goal:** The goals for this exciting project are four-fold:

* To provide a fully customizable interface that students can use to access and organized frequently used electronic homework resources.
* To provide students with *Free* access (though their library card) to subscription only resources that the Library subscribes to.
* To increase the number of library cardholders among middle & high school students.
* To increase the usage of our library's remote electronic resources and target a population that can uniquely benefit from them.

3.   **Participating institutions/agencies:** The Public Library of Charlotte & Mecklenburg County (PLCMC) & the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS)

4.   **Your role/expertise in this type project:** The library provided the expertise and web development talent to get this project off the ground. The core elements of the library's involvement in this project included:
* The inclusion of expertly selected materials that support the homework assistance and frequently asked student questions.
* Web design, development and hosting of the site.
* Student & staff training - The library hired a dedicated Brarydog coordinator to work closely with the school's media centers in providing customizable training and information sessions for both student and CMS staff.
* 24/7 online support through our Ask Brarydog service.

5.   **Outcomes / successes to-date:** Since its launch, the Brarydog site and the Library's initiative to reach out the CMS student population has been instrumental in assisting students with homework. To date, over 6,000 students and 900 teachers have attended specialized Brarydog training sessions to acquaint them with all the resources the site has to offer resulting in over 28,600 registered users and of this number nearly 16,000 have added a library card to their profile.   In the past two years, remote usage of our electronic resources has also has increased 32%.

However, the successes of this program are much greater than merely numbers. In media centers through out the 148 school system, Brarydog has been adopted as the official homepage for students to use when doing research on the Internet. But what's even greater are the comments like this that we receive on a regular basis from students themselves about this useful tool.

> *" I love Brarydog online because it really helps me a holelote I am a 7th grader ... thanks to Brarydog online I passed my test. I love you Brarydog, sincerely   Portia P."*

6.   **Lessons learned:** In the four years since the inception of this program we have gathered many lessons. Some of the significant ones are:
* To put as much effort into marketing the project as you do in creating/developing it. A large portion of Brarydog's successful launch and reach into the school system involved a fantastic media campaign complete with

donated billboard space, posters and footprint decals, selected advertising, extensive internal promotion and even a mascot. Brarydog (a play on Library and Prairie dog) even has his own rap song accessible through the Brarydog site.

* You need to provide more than just a great product (or application), you need to also put staff in place to support and promote it. Although the successful launch of the project can be attributed to a great media campaign, the long lasting success of the program has come as a result of putting the staff in place to continually support, train and promote the service. For the Brarydog project, we created a Brarydog Coordinator position who worked extensively with the school system and community to educating the public about the project and all that Brarydog had to offer.

* Don't stop developing the tool once you launch the product. Use student and teacher feedback to continuously improve it.

7. **If we began a new we would ask these questions at the beginning:** This project outlined and answered many of the initial questions early on which added to the project's success. However the answers to two questions might have assisted us better in paring down minor redesigns:

* How can we align our electronic resources and the format of the site to better support curriculum needs?
* What additional tools can we build into the product later to ensure that it will use with students?

8. **Critical success factors:** The critical success factors for this project mirror our lessons learned. They include:
* Marketing
* Training
* Dedicated staff liaison
* Talented Web Developers
* Listening to students needs

9. **Our next steps will be:** Disseminate lessons learned; model lessons, activities and projects**.**

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